

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Second Sunday After Easter. April 23, 2023

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 207:1-4, 189, 206:1-6, 208:1-8, 53.
Lessons: Genesis 18:1-19, 1 Peter 1:1-9, John 14: 1-21.
Sermon Text: John 20:24-29.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Among children there is sometimes a situation when someone would say something the other children don't believe, and someone would say "prove it". Doesn't that sound like Thomas, one of Jesus' disciples, when the others told him that they had seen the Lord and that he was alive? He said ***"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."***

Didn't Thomas say, in effect "prove it" when Jesus' other disciples told him that Jesus had risen from the dead and they had seen him?

Today let's look at an event that happened a week after Jesus rose from the dead.

THOMAS DIDN'T BELIEVE THE DISCIPLES WHO SAID JESUS HAD RISEN

- 1. He was skeptical and doubted that fact, but**
- 2. He gets to see firsthand proof that Jesus really had risen from the dead.**
- 3. What about those who have not seen it firsthand?**

Thomas wasn't there with the rest of the followers of Jesus who were gathered on the evening of that first day when he rose from the dead. That was the first time when Jesus appeared to the disciples behind locked doors. Those who were there and saw Jesus were convinced that it was really him, and that he had been raised from the dead. Mary Magdalene had seen him alive in the garden where he had been buried when she went to the tomb. Mary and the other women had even been told by the angel that he was not there but had risen from the dead. Peter and John went to the empty tomb and saw that he wasn't there. Cleopas and the other disciple who were walking to Emmaus that very afternoon had talked with him. Then Jesus appeared to the group. Thomas was not there at the time when Jesus appeared to them.

But they told Thomas all about it. The Word of God says: ***"So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.'"***

How many times in that first week after Jesus' Resurrection did ***"the other disciples"*** tell Thomas that Jesus was alive and that they had even seen him? It is easy to imagine they told him more than once, trying to convince him. Had Thomas wandered around in depression or despair, feeding his unbelief? Was he convinced that everything was hopeless? Did he think and feel that the Lord was dead and gone, and there was nothing more to hope for? Thomas' statement of unbelief is pretty blunt, isn't it? He is saying, "Prove it!" He didn't believe that Jesus had risen from the dead and he made that clear.

Are we shocked at Thomas' skepticism? Are we surprised that he didn't want to believe?

But how many of us don't, in our hearts, sometimes think the kinds of things that Thomas was saying out loud? He boldly said, "I don't believe that." Aren't there even things that God plainly says in his Word, the Bible, that our sinful flesh just doesn't want to believe? Aren't there doctrines that we sometimes find it hard to believe, that we want to reject and then to say and do something differently?

But really, isn't there unbelief in our lives, too, when it comes to what God says in his Word? It is really easy to point the finger at others, particularly the plainly heterodox false-teaching churches, and condemn them for not believing and following everything that God says. But how often isn't there something in God's Word that we have trouble believing? How often isn't there something in our lives that we want to hide from our fellow Christians, because we know, deep down, that we aren't following God's Word? How often isn't there something in God's Word that we don't want to make part of our lives because it conflicts with something that we want to do, or something that we don't want to give up, or something that we think is more important than what God says?

God knew what Thomas had said, even though Jesus wasn't right there to hear it. God even knew what Thomas was thinking, and Thomas then had seven more days of his time of grace to think about these things.

“A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’” Note that Jesus knew that Thomas wanted proof. That should have been the very first clue to Thomas that Jesus was alive. ***“Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.’ Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Then Jesus told him, ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”***

Then Thomas confessed his faith: “my Lord and my God.” Twice he says “my”, like grabbing Christ with both hands, and calls him both Lord and God! Thomas saw proof, material evidence, visible and physical.

We are reminded of the words of Jesus when ***“He said to [the disciples on the road to Emmaus], ‘How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”*** Luke 24:25-27.

It will be only by the Word of God, ***“beginning with Moses and all the Prophets,”*** that we will be convinced. It won't be persuasive arguments of men. It won't be my pounding on the pulpit to emphasize what God has written. It won't be the charismatic personality of the man in this pulpit. It will be the Word of God.

But there is more: Jesus says ***“blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*** That is where we fit into this history. We are truly blessed, who have not seen but have believed! We confess that ‘I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.’ So even though we have not seen Jesus, God the Holy Spirit can give us the gift of believing.

We read in Hebrews 11: ***“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”*** Hebrews 11:1 (NIV) To have implicit trust without seeing is faith; to see what has been believed is the reward of faith. The time shall come when those who have walked in faith shall be satisfied with Jesus' likeness and see him as he is. The psalmist David wrote: ***“And I – in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.”*** Psalm 17:15 (NIV)

We haven't seen Jesus, as Thomas was privileged to be with him for his earthly ministry. And then, Thomas even saw Jesus after he rose from the dead, and Jesus told him what he had said, about putting his fingers into the nail holes in Jesus' hands, and putting his hand into the spear-wound in Jesus' side. Thomas' name comes up about a dozen times in Scripture, incidentally, called “Didymas”, which is a word for “twin”, suggesting that he had a twin brother or sister. Thomas seems quite outspoken when the Word of God talks about him, though not as outspoken as Peter.

We can't prove everything that God says in the Bible in a way satisfying to those relying upon human wisdom. We proclaim the Word of God. We don't always have evidence from experience and events and things in the world around us about everything God says in the Bible. But doesn't man often in his earthly wisdom prove that what God says is true? Man doesn't always set out to prove God was right, but it happens. We have all learned that poorly cooked pork was a way that could spread disease. Pork was a meat forbidden among God's chosen people in the Old Testament. And of course, they couldn't always cook meat thoroughly, particularly wandering through the desert! As another example, it should even be plain and simple human logic to realize that people who seek to live in agreement with what we call “the Ten Commandments” just plain don't have all the problems with man's laws, and punishment, and depravity, and guilt, than those who pick and choose and obey

the commandments only whenever they feel like it. God, after all, calls them commands, not “suggestions and recommendations and helpful hints.”

Now we know that it isn't obedience to the Ten Commandments that gets us to heaven. We know that it was Jesus Christ's perfect obedience to all of God's commandments that gets us to heaven. God's command for us is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is faith. It is belief. It is doing exactly what Thomas in our text said he couldn't do: Believe. God tells us plainly: ***“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”*** Ephesians 2:8-9. God tells us plainly: ***“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”*** Mark 16:16.

Jesus himself told us after he rose from the dead ***“saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”*** Matthew 28:18-20 (KJV)

The one who believes and is baptized is saved. Unbelief damns. We don't get to choose what parts of God's Word we want to believe. Jesus said we are to obey all things he tells us in his Word.

When we do choose to reject what God says, what are we risking? Aren't we in danger of losing our faith? Aren't we falling into unbelief? Aren't we trading the sure hope of eternal life for things like the so-called pleasures and joys of this world and along with them, receiving eternal damnation?

God's Word has terrible warnings as in Hebrews chapter 6 for those ***“who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God”*** Hebrews 6:4-5) and then turn their backs on it or reject it in doubt and unbelief. We have the entire Old Testament history of God's chosen people, the Jews, who ultimately, as a nation, by and large rejected Jesus as Savior, as a warning for us.

If God says so, that is the way it is. And if we don't believe, we are damned. What is the heart of what we believe? That Jesus paid the price for my sins and for the sins of all mankind. That Jesus rose from the dead so that everyone who believes Jesus has saved him or her from his and her sins will rise from the grave to eternal life in heaven. That's the message that can overcome your doubt, your disbelief, your unbelief. That's the message you are commanded to share with others.

Please, God, give us the ability to fully believe all that you have written for our learning. Thomas doubted, he didn't believe. Then he confessed his sins and belief in the words ***“My Lord and my God!”*** We have our doubts, we have our moments and times of unbelief. But Jesus gives us tremendous encouragement and hope when he says ***“blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*** You haven't seen Jesus. You have only heard what he said and what he did. And God worked faith in you when that Word of God was proclaimed, and taught, and preached, and told to you.

What a joy that God has given us his Word, so that we may believe even though we cannot see Jesus face-to-face, at least until we see him on Judgment Day.

We don't rely on what man can prove. We rely on what God says in his Word. That is our proof. If God says so, that is enough for me! May God give us the faith of a simple child who says “I believe it because my daddy told me so;” “I believe because my heavenly Father has told me so.” Amen.